



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



James Tissot, Healing the Ten Lepers, 1886 and 1894.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

St. Francis of Assisi

Saint Francis' Prayer in Praise of God, Given to Brother Leo

You are holy, Lord, the only God,
and Your deeds are wonderful.
You are strong.
You are great.
You are the Most High.
You are Almighty.
You, Holy Father are King of heaven and earth.
You are Three and One, Lord God, all Good.
You are Good, all Good, supreme Good, Lord God, living and true.
You are love.
You are wisdom.
You are humility.
You are endurance.
You are rest.
You are peace.
You are joy and gladness.
You are justice and moderation.
You are all our riches, and You suffice for us.
You are beauty.
You are gentleness.
You are our protector.
You are our guardian and defender.
You are our courage.
You are our haven and our hope.
You are our faith, our great consolation.
You are our eternal life, Great and Wonderful Lord, God
Almighty, Merciful Saviour. Amen.

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Catholic
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& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.
- ▶ Today's liturgy is a call to faith for all believers.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First reading: 2 Kings 5: 14-17

- ▶ Elisha (which means God is salvation in Hebrew) was heir to Elijah's prophetic ministry.
- ▶ Elisha's heart for the poor and oppressed is important themes in his prophetic ministry.
- ▶ An Israelite slave girl told Namaan, a Syrian general afflicted with leprosy, about the healing Elisha had performed.
- ▶ The Israelite king was suspicious of Namaan since the peace enjoyed by Israel and Syria was tentative at best. The king was, however, sensitive to his condition.
- ▶ Elisha intervened and told the pagan Namaan to wash seven times in the River Jordan.
- ▶ Somewhat annoyed, Namaan did what he was told and was healed of his leprosy.
- ▶ Namaan took a piece of Israel's soil with him to Syria so he could build an altar to God once back in Syria.
- ▶ Namaan took Israel's dirt with him in response to the ancient belief that the power of gods was limited to specific geographical locations. He took the locus of his healing with him, thus hoping to ensure the action of God in his home of Syria.
- ▶ The author of 2 Kings makes sure to communicate that God's power is not limited to any one geographical location but is for everyone everywhere.
- ▶ Namaan the outsider—a foreigner—an outsider not welcomed by the Israelites-- foreshadows the salvation received by the Samaritan—the outsider—in today's Gospel.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ Namaan was a Syrian—an outsider who was offered God’s gratuitous healing. What is the challenge for us today as we reflect on God’s healing of Namaan?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about ourselves?

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 2, 8-13

- ▶ Background for this reading is Paul in prison awaiting martyrdom.
- ▶ Paul compared and contrasted the unchained word of God with the chains that bound him in his prison cell.
- ▶ Paul understood his suffering and pending death to be instrumental in promoting God’s kingdom.
- ▶ Paul’s doctrine of redemptive suffering would continue in the Church and the lives of the future martyrs and saints.
- ▶ Suffering was/is understood as prayer that furthers God’s saving work.
- ▶ Paul’s suffering was salvific because he was persistent to the end.
- ▶ Paul persisted for the sake of the Gospel and is thus an example of endurance.
- ▶ Even more than Paul we have the example of Jesus Christ crucified. Through the example and power of Christ disciples will be given the grace to persist and endure in the midst of persecution and suffering.
- ▶ Today’s pericope is a word for Christians of all generations. All Christians are called to suffer for their faith.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced persecution for the sake of what is right? What did you learn from the experience?

- ▶ If not, can you imagine a scenario in which you would be called upon to suffer for the sake of good? How do you think you would respond?
- ▶ What can we learn from the experience of suffering for the sake of the Gospel? What does it teach us about such suffering?
- ▶ What does it mean to you when you hear the term, “no pain, no gain.” What is the role of suffering in the Christian life?
- ▶ What good can come from your suffering?
- ▶ Why do you suppose suffering is such an important value for Christians? Why would God invite his children to endure suffering for the sake of others? What does that teach us about the role of suffering in life?
- ▶ The letter to Timothy also speaks of the role of faith in the time of crisis. When we are ready to falter, we have a reserve to call upon and that reserve is our faith that strengthens us. Have you ever experienced a time when your faith sustained you?
- ▶ What are the obstacles to calling on the faith we have been given? In what way can we overcome those obstacles?
- ▶ Have you ever been discouraged about a direction you have taken, thinking it is the will of God, but in the end questioning if you have what it takes to persevere? What does this letter teach us about perseverance?

Gospel: Luke 17, 11-19

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

Context for Biblical Leprosy.

- ▶ In 1868 the Norwegian scientist Gerhard Hansen’s discovered the biomedical cause of leprosy—a chronic, non-infectious skin condition.
- ▶ Spouses rarely pass it to their partner. It causes ulcerations and a loss of feeling. The ulcerations can include facial boils. This scientific information led to the belief that ancient leprosy and modern leprosy are not the same.
- ▶ How then are we to consider the disease leprosy from a biblical context? Leviticus leads the way. Leviticus describes a repulsive, scaly condition. Today’s medical community compares it to modern psoriasis.
- ▶ Leviticus 13-14 insists that clothes and walls in the home can be afflicted with it.
- ▶ Such a statement seems ludicrous to our modern sensibilities. The people of antiquity understood it far differently.
- ▶ Our ancestors were mindful of the divine command to “be holy as the Lord your God is holy [Lev 19:2].

- ▶ Holiness included many qualities but the most important qualities were bodily holiness and wholeness. Anyone with any physical imperfection was not holy as the Lord God is holy. “For no one who has a blemish may draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or a man with an injured foot or an injured hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles [Lev 21:16-20].
- ▶ No one with such imperfections was worthy to draw near to the Lord’s sanctuary. Leviticus insisted that those with leprosy, which could include something as benign as acne, must live outside the confines of the community.
- ▶ The community was of primary importance to the life and wellbeing of the people. Without community people died. Without community persons suffer and can die from seclusion.
- ▶ To touch a leper rendered a person unclean; that person must also undergo ritual cleansing in order to be whole again.
- ▶ Lepers polluted the environment and thus had to be excluded from it.
- ▶ It is with that background that we approach today’s story of the ten lepers.
- ▶ The ten lepers call to Jesus by name [an unusual occurrence in the gospels].
- ▶ It was an incredible expression of faith. Luke is the only evangelist to use the term Master—already affirming Christ’s omnipotence.
- ▶ Master was used when Peter hauled in the big catch of fish, at the transfiguration, when the apostles were tossed about in the storm at sea.
- ▶ One can draw meaning from this gospel text by the mere invocation of Jesus’ name. Listeners immediately took notice--something awesome is taking place. There is power in Jesus’ name.
- ▶ This Gospel reminds disciples how self-righteous, blind, and exclusive attitudes prevent people from recognizing the kingdom of God in their midst.
- ▶ What is a sign of God’s reign? Healing is a primary sign that the kingdom had arrived. The *Day of the LORD* is the day of inauguration. ON that day all will be saved—even the foreigner who returned to give thanks.
- ▶ This text is not just about healing; it is about salvation---a sign of the reign of God in our midst.
- ▶ The Gospel stories of recent weeks take place on the road to Jerusalem—the road all disciples must take.
- ▶ In biblical times leprosy was considered a sign of deserved punishment.
- ▶ Lepers were considered morally and ritually unclean. Their leprosy was a consequence of their sin. No matter the severity of their condition they were cut off from society.
- ▶ The exclusive disease of leprosy was a metaphor for sin and alienation from God. Sin makes us unfit to be in the presence of God. Leprosy makes one unfit to be contributing members of society.
- ▶ The poor leper was not only cut off from society, he or she was cut off from God as well. They were completely powerless and had no way of saving themselves.
- ▶ The only way to be restored to the community was to be ritually pronounced clean by the priests.
- ▶ Jesus’ healing action and sign to the people not only healed the lepers, but

restored them to their rightful place in the community.

- ▶ We are to take note of the one who returned to give thanks, the Samaritan.
- ▶ Jews and Samaritans hated one another. Samaritans believed that the religious center of authority was Mount Gerazim and Jews believed it was Jerusalem. Yet who returns to give thanks and praise? The Samaritan, not the Jew.
- ▶ The bottom line message in this story, however, is that all are welcome!
- ▶ The nine lepers, representative of Israel, did not return to give thanks.
- ▶ The nine healed lepers, like the Pharisees refused to see that the reign of God was in their midst.
- ▶ The promised messianic reign was present in the signs Jesus performed—the sacramental action of healing.
- ▶ What is key in this pericope is the salvation that was freely offered—given to all people. The salvation Jesus offered was universal.
- ▶ Through the sacramental sign of healing, salvation was offered to Jew and Gentile alike.
- ▶ There are two miracles—ten lepers were healed and a Samaritan came to faith in Jesus.
- ▶ All were healed, one was saved.
- ▶ The story teaches us that there is a difference between healing and salvation.
- ▶ One can be healed without coming to faith and thus be saved. The human response to healing and conversion is praise and thanks of God.
- ▶ Healing is salvific when it causes deep conversion. Through the messianic sign of salvation—through the saving action of Jesus in healing the ten lepers salvation was open to the entire world—even to non-Jews!



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ Put yourself in the place of the lepers, judging the cultural context of the day and your own approach to God, would you have been one of the nine Jewish lepers or the one Samaritan leper who returned? Explain your choice.
- ▶ Who are the lepers of our day? What is your response to them?
- ▶ How would you respond if someone were to ask you, “Are you saved?” How do you know you are saved? What evidence is there?
- ▶ How would it feel to be cut off from society? Who do we routinely cut off from polite society? In what way does our parish community welcome or reject such people?
- ▶ What is the challenge for us today in this Gospel? What obstacles stand in the way

of responding to Jesus' call in this Gospel?

- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ If we are called to do what is expected of us and have been given the faith needed to do what is expected of us, just what today is expected of us?
- ▶ What does the Gospel tell us is expected of us?
- ▶ What evidence is there that you are doing what is expected of you?
- ▶ What is there about the human condition that needs the challenge of this parable?
- ▶ What should you be doing—something that is expected of you—that you are not presently doing? What can you do to change that?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. It must be very difficult for immigrants like Namaan—foreigners in a foreign land—to seek healing. Elisha offered God’s healing and hospitality to a stranger—a biblical imperative. Whenever we reach out to the stranger, the immigrant, the oppressed or the poor we too offer God’s healing and hospitality.

The world gets smaller every day. Media has made it possible for us to observe the plight of the poorest of the poor in real time. Globalization has made us realize that we are all part of one large human, global village and that we have a responsibility to care for the least among us—no matter where they are geographically.

A close relative and a few close friends are active in Doctors without Borders. They are an example to me of the saving love God extended to the Syrian general in today’s Gospel. They offer their medical expertise to those who are desperate for help. Like Elisha they do not care about the status, color of skin or country of origin. They go where sent and are eager to offer help wherever help is needed. God healed and saved Namaan. We are invited to go out and do the same in God’s name.

#2. The witness of a twelve-year old girl touched me in our process of initiation. She shared how difficult it was to live the Gospel at school. Since she started to read the Bible and become closer to God she said she could no longer behave the way she had always behaved.

One day she decided to go to the lunch table where a group of ostracized girls ate their lunch every day. She sat down with them and became their friend. The brave young girl wept as she shared how from that day forward she became one of the outcasts—the “in” girls started mercilessly persecuting her. She did not realize that it would cost so much to live the Gospel. Would that I could be as courageous.

#3. Our parish reaches out to the world’s poor. I have never seen such an amazing commitment to caring for poor and oppressed people both here in this country and in Third World countries. We send people—youth and adults-- to various locales in the Third World so that we keep from merely throwing money after an issue but that we become intimately involved. We are to be lauded.

Yet there is always room for conversion. One Sunday an unkempt man with schizophrenia entered our church and wanted to attend Mass. The ushers immediately ejected him. Keeping in mind that we do need to try and preserve order in the assembly, the man was not loud or vocal—he was quietly agitated. What would Jesus have done? Would he have turned the poor man away from his only place of solace? I think not. While our parish is exemplary in every way, we are called not to be so smug as to think there is not room for conversion. We still have a long way to go before we fully embrace the inclusivity we are called to in our own communities—the inclusivity called for in today’s first reading and Gospel.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Anointing of the Sick
Salvation/Soteriology
Sacraments

Kingdom of God
Catholic Social Teaching
Eucharistic Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Today's liturgy is a premier liturgy for exploring the Church's sacrament of healing. Jesus healed the ten lepers. His healing ministry continues today with the same purpose Jesus had in mind—to bring people salvation. Today's liturgy is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the sacrament of ANOINTING OF THE SICK.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Ten lepers were healed, one was saved. Jesus offers salvation in today's Gospel through his healing sign. Healing is a sign of the kingdom Jesus came to inaugurate and the salvation he came to offer. We either can go on our way or like the Samaritan we can return and give God thanks and praise. We can accept the salvation that is freely offered. It is thus an appropriate occasion to focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

SACRAMENTS

Jesus' saving ministry continues in the sacramental life of the Church. His life and mission are made present to us in the sacraments of the Church. It is thus fitting that today we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SACRAMENTS.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Healing was prophesied as the hallmark of the Day of the Lord. When the blind see, the lame walk and the deaf hear, when lepers are healed, we will know we are living in the kingdom of God. Jesus inaugurated that kingdom. Today we see its fruits. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about the KINGDOM OF GOD.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Today's liturgy is a reminder that we are to tear down the barriers and distinctions that keep some people on the bottom while others thrive at the top. The healing and salvation Jesus offered in today's Gospel is universal—it is opened to all people inclusively—sick and whole, saint and sinner. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on the teaching of the Church that calls for justice for all of God's people—**CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING**.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.